

'72 Mercury Montego

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Never pull all the plug wires at once unless you know the firing sequence!

How many classic car owners are female? Probably a large number - but how many pull on coveralls to get into the grease and grime to do their own maintenance? I'm no mechanic and certainly don't have community college training, but when the flames died down from the wrong firing sequence, I learned really quick that one never removes all the plug wires at once. The summer that I revived a 1972 Mercury Montego from a 20-year sleep, I felt proud that I performed much of the work.

The ad in the local newspaper said "1972 Mercury Montego, 66,000 actual miles. Was running when stored. Make an offer." I didn't want to go look at it because my first car at 19-years old was a 1976 Montego and I knew if this one was in good shape at all, I'd want to buy it. My first mistake was in telling my teenage son about

the ad.

"You don't have to buy it mom. I just want to see what it looks like."

The next day, we looked - a little too hard. The gentleman backed the car into his garage in 1984 and it sat there for the next 20-years. The inside was dusty but looked good otherwise. A couple of tiny holes under the front door on the outside and some cracked paint were the only visible flaws. While my son prodded me to make an offer, I told the gentleman that I'd let him know the next day. Convinced that his mother was making no effort to consider the car, my son and I went home.

That evening I called Larry Welton, from Hoyt, NB to ask about the old cars that he restored. I figured he'd know what to do. I told him that the Montego had been sitting for 20-years but was supposedly backed into the garage.

"Well, then you tow it home,

change all the filters, fluids, and plug before you start it up."

"Are you kidding? You don't have to tear the engine down and clean it out?" Now my reserve excitement was almost a match for my son's.

The risk however was in how much to offer for a vehicle that wasn't running, and how much would I be willing to spend in repairs to get it road worthy if it did start? Welton suggested that if it was a Mustang people would offer several thousand for a car in that condition. But this wasn't a muscle car. It was an old family style car.

The placement of the car in the garage made it difficult to see on the side and I was afraid that it was in poor shape so I called the fellow back and asked for another look. When he arrived, the car was outside the garage. I offered him \$1,500.00. He called his son who restores old Dodges, they agreed it was a fair price, and I paid



the gentleman. My son and I followed the tow truck home.

I have no formal training in automotive repair but come from a large family of self taught mechanics. This was the first time that I bought a vehicle that I couldn't check the exhaust for that puff of blue or black smoke; the first time that I hadn't been able to listen to the engine in idle mode and tune into the ticking of poor valves etc., or shift from reverse to drive and listen for drive shaft or transmission defaults. The whole idea frightened me. After all, \$1,500 was a lot of money to toss away.

The first day I cleaned the inside of the car to reveal a shiny mix of Emerald/Moss Green leather and vinyl with no tears or stains. The inside was in showroom condition. The easiest task was finished.

We pushed the Montego into

my husband's welding shop to begin resuscitation. At this point my enthusiasm out weighed my intelligence. I was going to do most of the work with some direction from my husband. "Mechanics' 101" he said. Because he hates mechanic work, it was a welcome idea that I'd do my own maintenance. Well, it would have been welcome. My first lesson was a hard knock. I pulled all the spark plug wires before he realized what I had done. The air was blue in the shop and we hadn't even started the engine. We'd deal with it later.

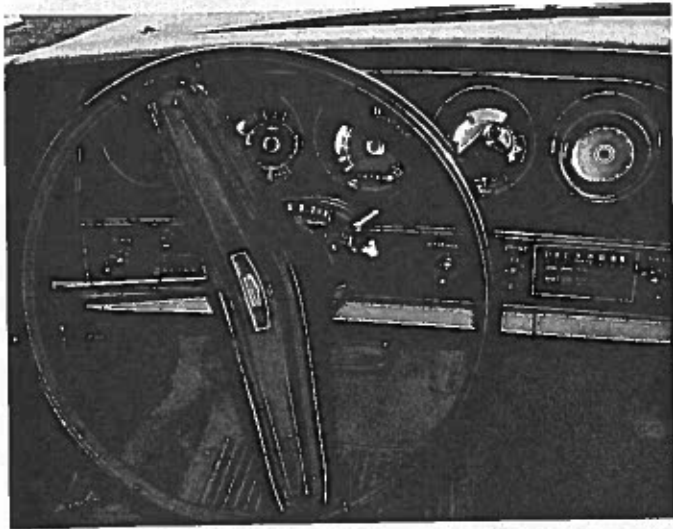
Larry Welton gave me a to-do list for reviving Lucille. With a spark plug wrench and a lot of effort, I finally loosened all eight plugs. I eased one tablespoon of transmission fluid into the holes to lubricate the rings before I installed new plugs. I also put mixed gas in the gas tank for initial operation to lubricate the fuel pump before filling it with straight gas. With a socket set I removed the bolts for the C4 transmission filter; replaced it and the fluid. Next step was to change the engine oil and filter. Part of the time I was laying beneath the car covered in black oils that missed the drain bucket. My shoulder length silver hair was turning black again. Now I know why mechanics wear those funny beanies. Of course a hoist might have come in handy.

Many of the parts we replaced were probably not necessary, but for the security that everything would run smoothly. Because neither myself, nor my husband were great at mechanic work, we asked a real mechanic to replace the fuel and brake lines and to clean the carburetor. I replaced the air and gas line filters and the solenoid switch. Many of these parts were so inexpensive compared to parts for newer vehicles so I figured spend the money now and save problems later. I checked but didn't need to change the brake and power steering fluids.

Having picked up new plug wires, I decided to install them myself. For any of you out there who consider changing this important component of your engine, get someone to help you who know what they're doing or remove and replace one wire at a time. With my husband/instructor not impressed by my first attempt to tamper with the wiring, I decided I'd rectify the mistake. With all the wires installed where I remembered where they went, I turned the key. BANG! The car backfired. I moved a couple of wires around. BANG! "Get the fire extinguisher," I screamed! Flames shot briefly from the carburetor, then ceased after leaving a black smoke patch on the underside of the hood.

I always believed that it's not

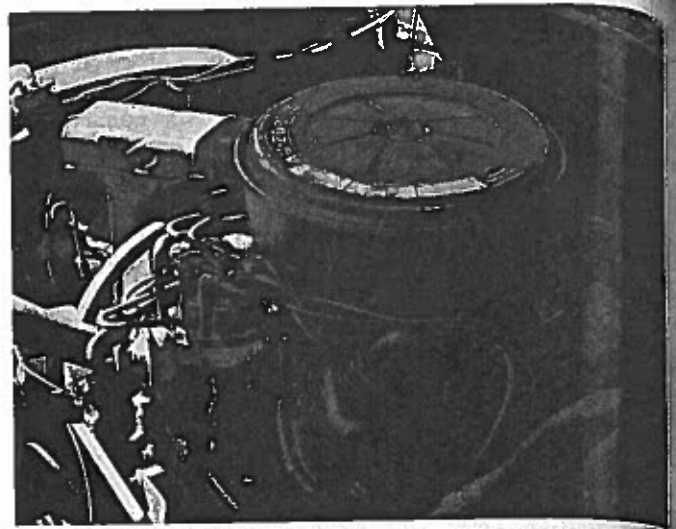




so much the quantity of information that someone knows that makes them intelligent but knowing where to get the information when one needs it. So I called the local Ford dealer, explained what I did, and asked for the firing sequence for the 302 engine. Written on a piece of paper, I offered them to my trying-to-be-patient husband, and we moved the wires around. Again, a blast of flame and some colorful words. This time I called my cousin, a professional mechanic, who has repaired and driven Ford vehicles for his entire life. He'd be a bit more understanding I thought. Yes, I had the right sequence, but Ford plug wires run left side 1, 2, 3, 4 front to back; right side 5, 6, 7, 8 front to back, not alternating like GMC engines. The Ford dealer mechanic also neglected to tell me that Ford distributor cap plug ends go counter clockwise as opposed to GMC engines which are clockwise. My husband always drove GM vehicles. OOPS!

I near drove the parts supply fellow crazy with constant appearances for this that or the other thing, but the muffler dealer got the worst of the deal. For a few days in a row, I took in a piece of rusted pipe and asked if he could make a piece "xx" inches long with the same size opening. Some of these rusted pieces were so corroded, it was difficult to determine exact lengths, but it went together eventually.

The day I started the engine without need of the fire extinguisher sidekick and drove the car out of the shop



I'm not sure who had the largest grin; my son or me. He suggested that she was one classy car and should have a name, so his suggestion of "Lucille" stuck. I drove the old girl into town about half an hour away and traded her old ply tires for new radial sneakers. Lucille was ready to run.

Sitting in traffic, I marvel at the simplicity of her compared to late model computerized vehicles. Many times I've looked down at the dashboard to see if the alternator light is on signifying that she stalled at a light. But she's still running. I just can't hear her for the traffic noise beside me. What she really deserves now is a paint job to make her stand out as the classy lady she is.

With only 71,000 miles to date, I know that this lady is good for over 200,000 as that was the mileage on my 1976 when I sold it based on the sound of the engine. My son and I took Lucille on a long distance trip last summer from Fredericton to Saint John and back. Driving after dark in known moose country usually makes me nervous but with 4-seal beam headlights, the road was lit up like a runway. When we drove into my door yard, my son, my car and I were all beaming.

The most satisfaction comes from the fact that I brought Lucille to life myself. Would I want to do mechanic work for a living? Not on your life. But I do wonder how many other women are brave enough to tackle vehicle maintenance. Sharon CC

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